

## **Dance Department History Project 2010-2011**

**Transcribed interview of Lee Wakefield on November 29, 2010**

**Interviewed by Susanne Johnson Davis**

I came here in the fall of 1980. It was done rather quickly. I was invited to come back as a faculty member in July for September that year. Because of the shortness of it, I had to go through the process of becoming a full time faculty member. My first time contract was as a part time faculty member. I came back with the assignment to be the artistic director of the ballroom dance company. Before that, it was the ballroom dance team. It may have been when I came, maybe a little before. The college made the decision to make each entity a company. It was the International Folk Dance Company, the Ballet Dance Company and so on.

The Ballroom Dance Company is the only one who has kept the name. Everyone else has changed since then. Linda and I came and directed the company, we taught classes, we got involved somewhat in some of the direction of the division of ballroom dance, although I didn't become a division administrator until four or five years later. There was a time when Susanne Davis helped administer the ballroom dance company. I helped; I was kind of in training, I guess. Emerson was also involved for a degree before he stepped out. We have taken the company and done the types of things you do when you travel and represent the company, the university and sometimes the US of A. We have traveled to over thirty-six countries. We have competed in and have won the US Championship, and we are undefeated in those competitions since 1982. We have won nineteen British Championships between Latin and ballroom dance.

After I became division administrator for the ballroom company, somewhere along the mid 80s until fall of 1999 when our department chair moved down the hall to be an associate dean (Sara Lee Gibb). I was appointed to be department chair early October of fall of 1999. This is now the fall of 2010. It has been a little over 10 years now, and I will be stepping out at the end of the semester.

I talked about the department chair position. That is the position that makes a difference in the way you perceive things because you change from being concerned about one program to multiple programs. You spend time trying to figure out priorities between divisions and programs, the allocation of resources becomes an issue. We've had a great division of administrators, who have done a wonderful job so I don't have to worry about some of those things. It's been pretty good. I've been fine with it.

We had an economic downturn three years ago, which created real issues with finances in the department. Not so much in the operating budgets, but the scholarship endowments were radically affected. It was a problem. We were asked by the university to do what we could to keep the scholarships going. We had done transfers each December to keep the scholarships going, which we were able to do. We are able to come out of it, somewhat. It has been one of the more difficult things I've managed to get through.

### **Who were your predecessors?**

I believe the dance department became a department in 1980. I think Phyllis Jacobsen was the chair of Women's Physical Education before that. Dance was a part of that, the university made the decision to split that, and she became the department chair although she wasn't a dancer or dance educator. She helped shape the department for a number of years. It was probably in the early 90s when she retired and at that point, Sara Lee Gibb came in as department chair for five or six years. I came in when she moved down the hall. She ultimately became dean of the college. In June of 2008, the dance department was officially moved from Health and Human Performance to the College of Fine Arts and Communications. I was involved in that transition of policy and procedures and that has worked out pretty well. It hasn't been problematic. We feel welcome in the new college; we were certainly loved in the last college, but our move has turned out to be fine.

### **In your tenure, what facilities have been added to the department?**

We've had a couple of significant additions since I've been chair. In the early 2000s, probably 2002, we were able to receive funding to create a dance medicine training facility. We were authorized to bring in a sports trainer. We brought in Rob Nuttall, who is still our trainer. We developed what had previously been costume storage and a garage for a couple of driver education cars and custodial storage. We developed that into a dance training

room, which is a little small for our needs. We have two part-time staff positions, and we have student trainers from exercise science and that's a pretty good operation that helps us support what goes on with our performers. They also take care of support for our main stage concerts, as well as tours across countries. That has brought a more consistent level of performance for our students. We've had less of the nagging injuries, which has helped students to stay in the classroom or on the performance floor for longer periods. It has been great.

Another facility improvement, not an addition, was that the building on the southeast part of campus was taken down about 2008. That facility had two dance rooms in it that were brought over to the northeast area of the RB. I was involved with the dance needs of the department and what we would be doing in those facilities. It's a combined effort with the School of Music because Young Ambassadors and Living Legends were housed in AMB, and they came to the RB with all their costume spaces and office space. We have a great facility now in the northeast part of the RB. It has enhanced our department because it is closer and the facilities are great. It certainly didn't add any square footage, but it is better.

Another thing we did add: when we reduced the costume storage in the northeast part of the RB downstairs to make room for the dance training facility, we were able to have access to an Albertson's story up near University Avenue, about half a mile and we have a nice section of that building which has been cornered off, and we have a lot of costumes of the department stored there. It has been a blessing, it has been a good facility, it's clean and we have a truck to bring over things, which has provided some good things. It's been good to have that facility.

### **How does the dance department interface with performing arts management, and what do you think are the benefits are of the touring program?**

The performing arts management handles approval and the logistics for when University groups leave and tour and perform regionally. They do a nice job with booking us with things they need to do. Things have changed in our world since 1980. Sometimes management tends to be a little like they have been by having stakes and wards sponsor us, which can work well, but there is also a professional element that is good for us to get professional sponsors to take us. We would make more money and get more exposure when that happens. We have encouraged them to help us in that direction. They do pretty well, but they could help us a little more in that area. But, I am happy with them.

We have also received funding from them now to help us with our technical support needs, we have two full timers and a three-quarters timer and some student help. That helps us to support our dance department technically and that helps them to reduce their expenses as well as help us. That's what they do, and they do a pretty good job. I do think they have a difficult situation. The Church has made demands and changes that have affected them and then us. So far, we have been okay. The program has reduced some by a third, but we are chugging along and I think we are doing okay.

### **What are the connections the department has with the big Dance Sport at BYU?**

Dance sport is part of the ballroom division. It allows students to compete. We have sponsored three a year. We have a small one in the summer—not a lot of setup but a lot of fun. We have a larger event at November, and since about 1995, we host a larger Championship in the Marriott Center in March. These dance sport events give our students the opportunity to compete with a partner of their choice if they wish to. We have about 60% of students in ballroom classes participate. We have a class competition for every class level, and we have quite a few students who enjoy that. What it does do is help them to practice, and they get better because of that, and when they do better, we look better. It has a positive effect on the program particularly when we compete internationally. That has helped make a difference.

Then there are the championships in March, and there are a significant number of competitors who come from out of state. These competitors have helped us to bring real visibility for what dance sport is and what it can do for us here. We have now developed a large fan base, and last month at the event, we had 5,400 people. We usually get about 13,000 in March and a couple thousand in the summer. Added up, that is 20,000 people a year, which helps us financially, although it is not cheap. We pay a healthy facility rental, whether it is the Wilkinson or Marriott Center. Usually, we make some profit, which helps us as well. Something that has significantly helped the ballroom program because of dance sport is our scholarship program. We now have

thirty-two scholarships for the performers in the ballroom dance company and there are thirty-two performers. All students on the company have a minimum of a half tuition scholarship. A good number of these have come from people who are not LDS, but come to our dance sport events and want to be a part of what we did. Over the years, eight of the thirty-two have had nothing to do with us being LDS, only through their experience with dance sport have they been able to want to be a part of our team. That has been a great blessing to our students.

**As a faculty member, what have the personal benefits been of coming and staying at BYU?**

The opportunity to be on the faculty at BYU has been a blessing. It has also brought responsibility with that. As a faculty member, it has been my responsibility to represent us as members of the church, and to make sure what we do is hopefully a positive reflection on the church and university. That generally happens in our department, I think. Mistakes can happen, poor judgment can be had, or things can happen that create concern, but both as an artistic director and department chair, my sense is that the university appreciates what we do and that we meant to be responsible with our programs, and they have been able to help us in ways that help the university.

Could I have made more money elsewhere? I'm sure the answer could be a yes. But I have been well taken care of and I have only appreciation and respect for how the university has treated me as a faculty member.